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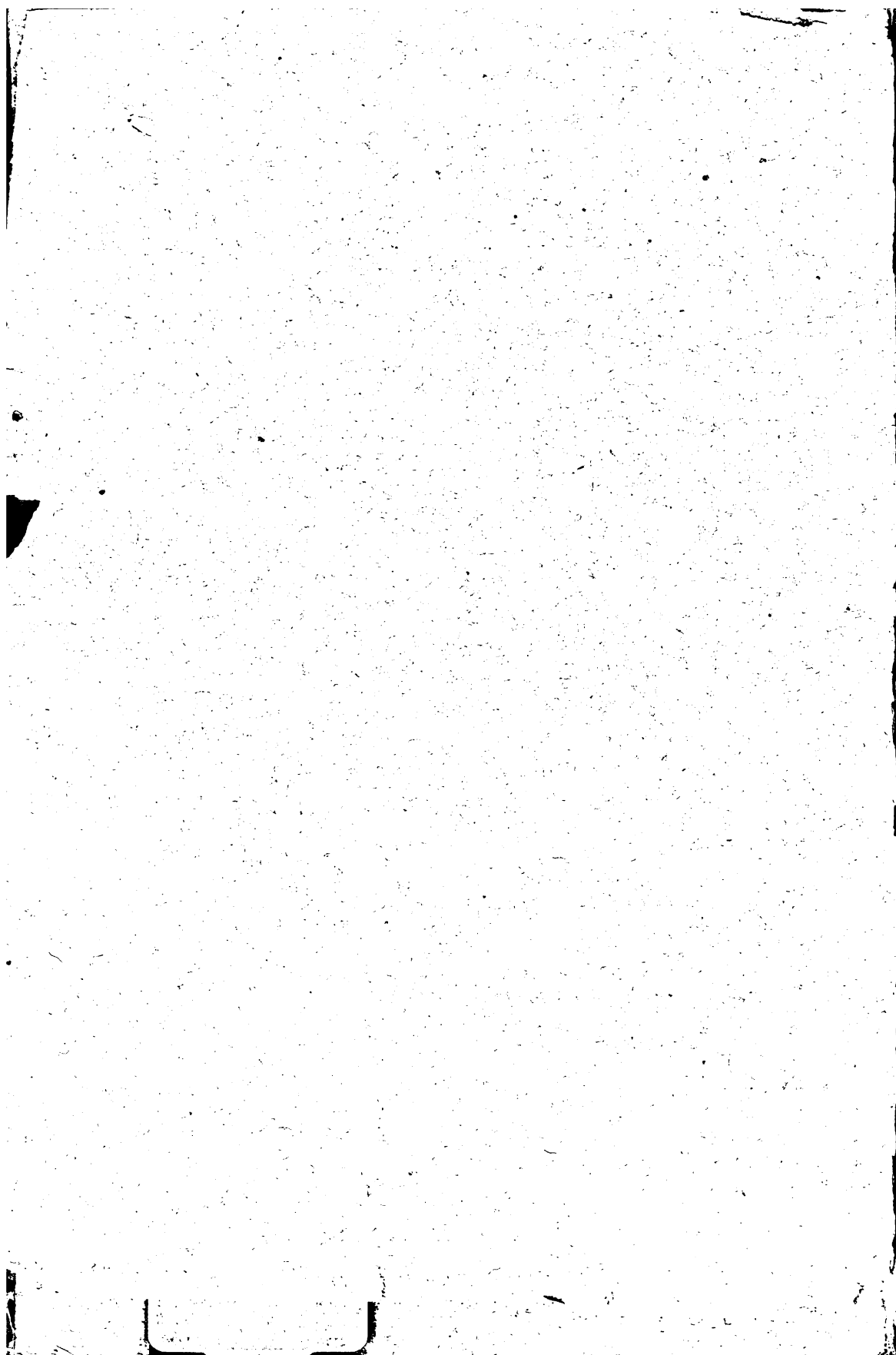
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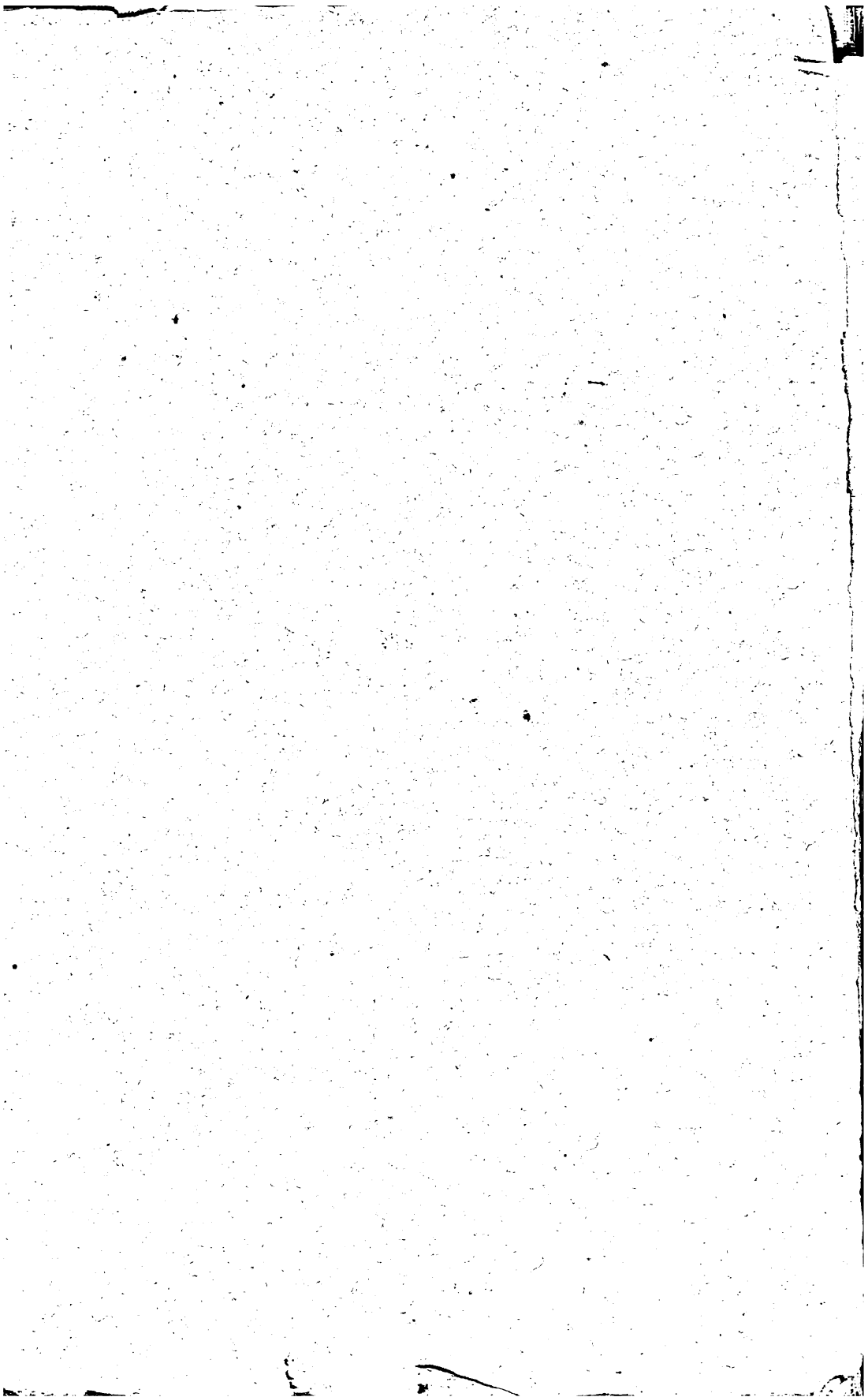
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Ibsen at Home

BY

EDGAR O. ACHORN

(Copyright)

Reprinted from the
New England Magazine
February, 1896

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IBSEN AT HOME.

By Edgar O. Achorn.

IT was early on a June evening that I crossed Carl Johans Gade, in front of the Grand Hotel, Christiania, to meet Ibsen. Although the sun was still more than two hours high, the shadows of the mountains which encircle the city had lengthened somewhat, and the fine gold and orange hues so characteristic of a sunset in this northern land were gathering to give warmth and color to the sky far into the night. The best part of the day in this gay capital is still to come; it will be long after midnight before the last pleasure boat leaves the fjord, or the last reveller quits the festive board. The scene upon which I looked is a favorite one of Ibsen's. In the window of the hotel over my head it is his wont to sit and study the people, until this watch tower has come by common consent to be recognized as his, and is known as "Ibsen's window."

Directly over the way stands the "Stortings Husset," where just at present the future destiny of Norway—the question whether she is to continue to cast her unhappy lot with Sweden or to play a lone hand in the game of nations—is being fought out. Across the "Studenters Lunden" are the Tivoli Gardens; a glance at the throng of gayly dressed people gathered there for the music and feasting would banish at once the thought of anything so

serious as a national crisis. Then comes the new Christiania Theatre, in process of construction, for the adornment of which the Danish sculptor Lansing is now working upon a figure of Ibsen. At the head of the street towers the "Kongen's Slot," and hard by it is the University Building. The street, the mall, the saloons, are well filled with people at this hour; one



THE GRAND HOTEL AND IBSEN'S FAVORITE PROMENADE.

hears a babel of tongues from the café hard by; a knot of the King's Guard swings down the walk and salutes the officer discussing his sandwich and beer; an Englishman is disputing with his cabman over the fare. So, from his vantage ground at the hotel window, a sweep of the eye presents to the poet nearly every phase of human life; royalty, the statesman, the soldier, the actor, the student, the reveller, the traveller from foreign parts, the high and low, the rich and poor,—all are included. From the contemplation of this scene Ibsen has no doubt caught

many a suggestion which has found expression in his later writings.

Mr. Ibsen would see me on the veranda, I was told, and, accompanied by my Christiania friend, I was

scarcely touch upon the incidents of his career. He was born on the 20th of March, 1828, in the small timber port of Skien, in Norway. His father was descended from a Danish family,



HENRIK IBSEN.

ushered into the presence of Henrik Ibsen, the most discussed, admired, criticised and misunderstood writer of our time—perhaps nowhere read more than in sections of the public reached by the *New England Magazine*.

Ibsen has become so familiar to the American public that one need

long given to trade, in which there was a mixture of Scotch blood. His mother belonged to an old German family in Skien. His father was lively, enjoyed society, and is said to have been quick at repartee. His mother was quiet, retiring, and looked on the dark side of life. It is easy to see then,



IBSEN'S WINDOW IN THE GRAND HOTEL.

if we are to lay stress as he does on heredity, that Ibsen took his satire and wit from his father, his idealism and his dark views from his mother. His father had a large business in Skien; and all went well in the little two-story house opposite the church till Henrik was eight years old. Then a change came. His father failed, and the family moved into the country; and from that time life was a struggle.

In Skien Henrik attended a school kept by two theological students, the principal purpose of which schooling seems to have been to prepare him for confirmation. Later he was sent to Grimstad, a little town of eight hundred people, where he secured a position in a drug store. Everything in this place except the sea was narrowing. Ibsen chafed here under his restrictions. He appears to have scoffed at everybody and everything, and was in turn cordially disliked. Here, however, he found time to study and to write. In 1850, he entered the university

at Christiania. The reputation acquired by his dramatic writings,—for thus early he made his beginnings at these,—secured him a position at the Bergen theatre in 1852, and a “stipendium,” with which he studied abroad. He continued at this theatre and the Christiania theatre, as dramatic

manager, till 1864, when, disgusted that the Swedes and Norwegians refused to aid the Danes in their contest with Prussia, he wrote caustic epigrams about his fellow countrymen, and left the country, only to return after an absence of twenty-five years. The greater portion of this time he spent in Dresden and Rome.

At the age of twenty-two he published *Catalina*, which was followed by *Fru Inger*, *The Comedy of Love*, and *Rivals for the Crown*, having thus, be-



ON THE VERANDA OF THE GRAND HOTEL.



SKIEN HARBOR.

fore he left Norway, produced his historical and legendary tragedies in prose. While in Italy he wrote *Brand* and at Ischia and Sorrento *Peer Gynt*, dramatic poems, which at once made him famous. Strange as it seems, he forthwith abandoned rhyme and metre altogether. *Youth's Bond*, *Emperor and Galilean*, *Pillars of Society*, *The Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, *The Wild Duck*, *The Lady from the Sea* and others, lastly *Little Eyolf*, have followed in succession, some gloomy and sardonic, others fresh and invigorating, but all provoking such a measure of discussion that both continents have rung with the author's name. The recent production of his works to crowded houses adds the fame of the successful dramatist to that of the author; and to-day, at sixty-seven, Ibsen stands on the loftiest pinnacle of his brilliant literary career.

The poet sat at a table, facing me, as I stepped forward. He is a man of striking personality. His hair is long and gray, and he wears it combed straight up from his forehead. The

forehead itself is high, broad and prominent. His whiskers are gray and bushy; and he wears large gold-bowed spectacles. The lower part of his face sinks into insignificance beside these more marked characteristics. I can scarcely see his eyes under the beetling brows and behind his spectacles; I make them out to be small and blue, and I have the sensation of being peered at instead of looked at. His nose is small and irregular; his mouth, small, firm and straight. He was dressed in a black broadcloth coat, double breasted, long and closely buttoned, a white satin tie and dark trousers, while a silk hat, a walking stick, a pair of brown cotton gloves and his spectacle-case lay near him. He was sipping a glass of Scotch whisky and soda.

I spoke as I seated myself opposite him, of the greetings which I brought from many admirers in America.

"I thank you," he replied, "I have some very good friends in America."

He spoke very slowly and with a reserve that was little less than cold-

ness. He drew a long black comb from his inside pocket, and proceeded to set his hair more on end, if possible, than it already was. The feeling took possession of me that, himself so given to studying others, he was the kind of man who would give one very little insight into his own thoughts and feelings unless he chose to.

The conversation quickly turned upon the extent to which his writings were misunderstood, and I spoke of the misunderstandings in American circles.

"Yes," he said, fast growing warmer, "I have received a number of letters from Boston ladies, asking me what I meant by this or that expression or

spirit of genuine *bonhomie* took its place. He glanced at his still well filled glass of spirits and asked us to join him. True to the instinct of a Maine man, I of course did so. The opportunity of draining a glass with Henrik Ibsen, I thought, did not fall to the lot of every man, and the stoutest teetotaler could pardon me.

"I must tell you," said the doctor, when we had settled ourselves more at our ease, "of something which befell me not long ago, which annoyed me exceedingly. A French journalist in an interview asked me what I thought of the modern French drama. I replied that I was an anarchist toward it, whereupon he announced to the



SKIEN, THE BIRTHPLACE OF IBSEN.

sentence in my writings; but I have never attempted to explain myself to them. In order to do so perfectly, I should have been obliged to go to great length and recount many details. Not having time for this, I thought it better to leave the questions unanswered. I am not only misunderstood," he added, "but I have not infrequently been misquoted."

As the conversation went on, the poet's reserve seemed to vanish, and a

world that 'Ibsen was an anarchist,' and I was assailed on all sides."

I broached the subject of our own American literature.

"I am not a good English scholar," said Ibsen. "I have read very many American authors, however, as Holmes, Emerson and Howells, but mostly through German translations. So far as I have read, American literature has impressed me very favorably." The talk turned particularly upon



IBSEN'S BIRTHPLACE.

THE HOUSE IN WHICH HE WAS BORN IS THE MIDDLE ONE
ON THE RIGHT.

Howells, in whom he was interested, but he said nothing quotable. "I never give an *opinion* of any author," he said. "My work in the world has not been in the line of criticism. I have not the time to criticise others' writings. Criticism requires exact study. My efforts lie in quite another direction."

I told him that he ought to come to America; he would have a most cordial welcome, and it was such an easy matter nowadays.

"Yes, to cross to America is an easy matter," he said. "I have often thought of going, and still have it in my mind; but for me it would be like sending a portmanteau,—that is easy. The difficulty begins after I get there, and lies in the language. I should be very much hampered in that direction."

I spoke of the important body of our population speaking German or French, the great numbers of Scandi-

navians in the Northwest, and of the fact that there was one United States Senator who was born in Scandinavia.

"But if I came to America," said Ibsen, "it would be to visit my friends and to study the native American; and in order to do that well I must have a command of the language, for I think the simon-pure American clings tenaciously to his own language and institutions. Is it not so?"

I owned that it was true of the Yankee and the Southerner.

The conversation passed naturally to the position of woman in America. In nothing probably has Ibsen provoked more discussion than in his general treatment of the position of woman. In writing *The Doll's House*, he won for himself the title of "the woman's poet," because forsooth, he had pictured a wife who, sick of being treated as a child and of playing the rôle of a child, disappointed at not finding her husband the man she had taken him for, abandoned him and her children and went out into the world to learn something and to collect her senses. It was *The Doll's House* that was supposed, from the time of its appearance, to illuminate all his previous writings; it struck a blow, people said, at all the existing social conditions; it certainly set up such a clamor in Europe that the arch of heaven fairly rang with it. Discussion was carried to such a point in Scandinavia that social invitations, I was told, bore the foot note: "You are requested not to mention Ibsen's *Doll's House*."

"I have never attempted to demonstrate in any book of mine," said Ibsen, "a theory of woman's working out her own salvation alone, living a happy and successful life in a sphere entirely independent of man."

Ibsen's woman is always found in a European environment, is a Euro-

pean woman with something of Ibsen put into her. She is never an American woman, with an American woman's tact and versatility. Ibsen simply emphasizes in his writings that a woman should be regarded as the equal of man, should be taken into his confidence and treated as a rational being. He persistently demands for her trust and freedom of thought and action. To the greater part of Europe, where a woman is simply a *hausfrau* to lay the table and bear children, or a fine bird to be kept in a cage or, if allowed abroad, to be watched, such a doctrine is heresy, but with us it is accepted as a matter of course. I do not mean that Ibsen has not fairly won his title of "woman's poet," for he has fought valiantly for woman's emancipation from the chains of European conventionality; but I say that from our point of view he advocates no new thing. Personally Ibsen is very fond of women; and they, in turn, are very fond of him. Not unfrequently one sees him on the street or lunching at the café with some favorite and favored young lady. He is very gallant.

The question was raised as to how far he found his characters in real life, and how far they were creatures of his imagination.

"They are both," he said. "I have been going about studying life and character now, for twenty-seven or twenty-eight years, mostly in Germany and Italy, and my characters are either taken from the people and my incidents from fact, or they are suggested to me by experi-

ences of life which I have myself shared or seen."

He asked, speaking of the critics who say that his characters and situations are unnatural, whether I thought of any cases in point.

I ventured the opinion that in *The Lady from the Sea*, the attraction of Ellida for the strange man was novel, to say the least, while *Ghosts* seems unnatural to many, and its philosophy, so far as most understand it, hard for them to approve.

"And yet both emphasize the existence of real forces at work upon humanity," exclaimed the doctor, his face aglow with animation. "My intention was to put Ellida under the influence of another than her husband, of such an intensity as to be at times irresistible. Such an influence has often been found, and has led many a woman astray. As for *Ghosts*, the whole drama was written to emphasize the influence of heredity. It is cruel, as is much else one

finds in real life, but on that account the more to be respected."

I asked him which he himself considered his best work. The question evidently struck him as amusing,—and perhaps it was,—for a smile played over his face, chasing away the earnestness of the moment before.

"To-day no work in particular. Each book was written in its own time, and each at the time seemed best, for it was the expression of the thought and spirit which then animated me."

I asked him why, after writing *Love's Comedy*, *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*, he abandoned dramatic poetry and took up prose.



IBSEN IN EARLY LIFE.

IBSEN AT HOME.

"I might say, briefly," he answered, "that it followed of itself. At that time I turned to the study and treatment of modern life. Poetry could not have been used to develop my ideas. It would have been out of place."

He said that he derived the greatest satisfaction from those of his works which he had specially written for the stage, and which had been successfully produced. One could almost have anticipated the reply. The toy theatre at Skien, the long course of study, the

things in Europe and America. Again he expressed his regret that he had not a better knowledge of English, remarking, by way of explanation, that his life had been spent largely in Italy and Germany, and that he had devoted himself to the mastery of the language and literature of those countries at the expense of others, as being necessary to his writings. As I finally took my departure, he invited me cordially to come and see his study.

So it came about that on the following day I found myself in his home in



VICTORIA TERRACE.

years of service at the Bergen and Christiania theatres,—all have stimulated that natural fondness for dramatic art, which is to-day paramount in Ibsen.

The influence of his works he believes is most felt in Germany. "I am not aware that they have made any marked impression in America," he said; and he added that he must leave it to others to say what the final outcome of his influence and that of the modern realistic school in general will be.

When by and by I rose to go, the poet exclaimed warmly, "Don't go yet"; and we sat and chatted of many

the Victoria Terrace, perhaps the most attractive building of the kind in the fashionable quarter of Christiania. On the one side stretch the grounds surrounding the king's palace; on the other the land falls away to the beautiful Christiania fjord.

Ibsen's home is an ideal one.) The picture taken from the palace which accompanies this article, shows a portion of the Terrace and also of the view from Ibsen's windows which are on the side toward the water. (His suite comprises a reception room, a salon, very large and airy, a dining-room, cabinet, study, and a number of sleeping rooms.) The



THE SALON.

views of the rooms, which are presented herewith, will give the reader a far better idea of their character than any words of mine. One is struck with the exquisite taste displayed on every hand, and with the collection of paintings which adorns the walls, every one of which is a gem. They are mostly the works of old Italian masters and views of Norwegian scenery, the former collected during Ibsen's sojourn in Italy.

The study, to which we finally come, is of course the most interesting room, for it is here that Ibsen produces those strong works which not alone reach the homes of the millions who speak his native tongue and who regard him as their great teacher, but which in rapid succession pass through translations and become the property of all Christendom. Ibsen writes at his table by the window. Everything in and about the room is scrupulously neat and in perfect order.)

Before I came away from Christiania I was so fortunate as to secure, by Ibsen's kind directions, the beautiful views of his home, which are reproduced with this article and which I

think have never before been placed before American readers.

If one were to ask me of my personal impressions of Ibsen, I should say that the first glance at his mighty forehead, his shaggy hair, his sharp eye, his firm mouth, his ruddy complexion, his compact build, made me feel that there was a tremendous power behind it all and that Henrik Ibsen was a man of intense thought and passion. Ibsen's facial expression is remarkable. Under intense feeling, his face hardens, his color deepens and his eyes blaze. Instinctively one looks for shelter, feeling that the storm is about to burst. Quickly the skies clear, the face softens, the eyes twinkle merrily, there is a suggestion of dimples at the corners of the mouth, and an expression at once very droll and very winning plays upon the features. He is a man of moods. If you catch him at one time, or if you "hit him right," he will do what no persuasion would induce him to do at another. Friends to whom I spoke of my own pleasant meetings with him told me that he is often unapproachable. The chosen few nearest him in Christiania let him

